

**Testimony for HB 505 Clarify Offense of Aiding or Soliciting Suicide  
Wednesday February 20, 2013**

My name is Moe Wosepka, and I serve as Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference which is the public policy arm of the two Catholic Diocese; Great Falls-Billings and Helena.

This is a difficult and very complex issue. People suffer, and it is important to find ways to reach out to those who are in great pain, those who are depressed, and those voice thoughts of suicide. As compassionate people we should endeavor to find ways to help those who suffer. I think that is a common concern of those on both sides of this issue. It's a matter of discovering which direction is the best for the good of society and the people who reside there.

From a Catholic prospective we attempt to protect life, all life from conception to natural death. My thoughts that I share with your today emanate from that place. In every public policy decision we make we should look first at how we preserve life.

You heard about elderly abuse, and I believe that is a huge issue. A recent article in many of the state's largest papers addressed the crisis of elderly suicide, stating that suicide rates are the highest among the oldest Montanans. Dr Cornwell, a professor at the University of Rochester who researches suicide among the elderly says that "Mental illness is by far the rule," It's the exception that an older person takes their own life without diagnosable psychiatric illness." The article also addresses loneliness, and feeling they are a burden on the family as reasons for adults to slip into depression and commit suicide. I have a copy of the article to pass out incase some of you have not seen it.

When we get to making state policy we have to find cut offs. In this instance its adults who are terminally ill and in great pain. So we draw the line there. However as compassionate people there are others we see who are in great pain who may not be terminally ill. Should we restrict our solutions to pain to those who are terminal? There are children who are terminal and in great pain. Should we allow parents to make those decisions for them? As compassionate people shouldn't we be finding solutions for them also? What if the child is from an abusive family and the state has terminated parental rights? Should the state be allowed to make that decision.

There are times that the state has to make very difficult decisions, but when the issue is the life of a citizen, they cannot possibly address all the conditions that would cause people to be in great pain, be terminal, be of the correct age. Those conditions affect the full spectrum of life.

One more thought. Currently there are those of us on both sides of this issue who say that assisted suicide is illegal in the state and there are those who say it is legal. When death is the goal of assisted suicide I don't think it's in our best interest to allow this issue to continue in such a state of uncertainty. Today you have the option of clearing up that uncertainty by clarifying current law as it relates to aiding or soliciting assisted suicide.

For this reason and those many of the concerns expressed by others we stand in strong support of HB 505 to Clarify Offense of Aiding or Soliciting Suicide.